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MY OTHER LIFE: JARED SMITH

May 25, 2012 by JoLynne Lyon

Last weekend some of us enjoyed the solar eclipse through a pinhole, projected onto a sheet of white paper.

Not Jared Smith.

By day he's the associate director of the CPD's WebAIM project; by night he's an astronomy photographer. And last Sunday, he brought his equipment out while the sun still shone.



Read his interview below.

Q: Why do you photograph stars?

I love nature and enjoy watching the heavens. Photographing stars, galaxies, nebulae, satellites, and anything else in space allows me to capture the scenes so I can enjoy them anytime and share them with others.

Q: What kind of equipment does it take?

Anyone can simply point a camera at the sky and capture some amazing photos. With a telescope, one can just photograph the image through the eyepiece to get a more magnified and detailed photo. To capture deep space objects like galaxies and nebulae, you need a bigger telescope, an equatorial mount that moves to track the object as it moves across the sky (or more accurately, moves to counteract the motion of the earth revolving beneath that object), a nice camera, and LOTS of patience. Most of my galaxy photos are a combination of dozens of exposures that can each be several minutes in duration. Capturing the photos is only half the work - you then need to combine all of the images in complex software to get the final results.



Q: What do you have to do to get these photos?

Most good astrophotographs takes a lot of planning, much patience, enduring long, cold, sleepless nights, cooperative weather, hours of post-processing, and a fair amount of luck.

Q: Is it worth the effort?



Usually. Sometimes you can spend hours photographing a galaxy to then realize that your focus was off or your camera was set incorrectly. I only post maybe one tenth of the photos I've taken. The worst was when the sprinklers turned on, leaving me and thousands of dollars worth of equipment soaking wet. But when a photo comes together it's well worth the effort--not only because I've captured something so beautiful and awe inspiring, but because it represents an incredible amount of time and effort to get things just right.

We'd like to thank Jared for sharing his photos with us--it was hard to narrow down the choices. If you want to see more of his work visit his website.

"My other life" is a recurring feature on the exceptional things our people do when they're not at work. It's a summer/Friday thing.